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YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE CHURCH

A Suggested Plan for a Project for Young People's Groups

By

ERWIN L. SHAVER



THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
CHICAGO · ILLINOIS

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PUBLICATIONS
IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

EDITED BY

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CONSTRUCTIVE STUDIES

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE CHURCH

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

THE BAKER & TAYLOR COMPANY
NEW YORK

THE CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
LONDON

THE MARUZEN-KABUSHIKI-KAISHA
TOKYO, OSAKA, KYOTO, FUKUOKA, SENDAI

THE MISSION BOOK COMPANY
SHANGHAI

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Published October 1925



Composed and Printed By
The University of Chicago Press
Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.

GIFT OF
SHAILER MATHEWS

A FOREWORD TO YOUNG PEOPLE

The flame of God through your spirit stirs,
Adventurers,—O Adventurers!

Yes, you are adventurers, abounding in life and looking forward joyfully to the opportunities of the new day. With you action counts more than words. You are eager to have your chance to discover, to create, and to accomplish. In your own new way you intend to make this a better world to live in. You spurn hypocrisy and demand a creed that can be interpreted in terms of everyday life.

It is these qualities of yours which the author has taken into account in suggesting a program for your young people's group. At first glance it may seem a strange way to organize a course, but as you look more carefully, you will see that it is not just a course of study. In its various sections you will find a program which will call forth your highest and best energy.

With the hope that you will find in this project program that which stirs into flame your spirit of adventure, which furnishes you an opportunity to do the things that count most, and which challenges your highest Christian ideals, the author dedicates this little book to the youth of today.

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INTRODUCTION

On many sides we see evidences of restlessness on the part of youths with regard to their relations to the church. Some go so far as to say that young people have no use for the church and are actually in revolt against it as well as against other institutions of society. More careful observers, however, see something else. In this critical, but nevertheless sincere, attitude of yours they believe that you voice that age-old spirit of the church, the prophetic call to build a new world "nobler than the last."

If you can be led to discover this true meaning of the church, you will rejoice in the forum it offers to the seeker after light and abundant life. If you experience the joy of making a real and worth-while contribution to its ongoing life, you will love it not alone for what it has been and is, but particularly for what it may be with your help. If you can gain that larger share in its fellowship and privileges which is justly yours, you will find it just the agency you need to make a more Christian world.

These convictions are in the background of the

project course which follows. It is offered as an interesting educational program for your young people's group. It is to be hoped that you will find the execution of these activities resulting in a more intelligent, devoted, and active loyalty to the church, the church as Jesus means it to be in this day and generation.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS AS TO ORGANIZATION

1. The activities herein outlined are intended for students of later high-school age but they are equally interesting and can be more thoroughly executed by those who are older. Membership in the group should be made contingent upon interest and previous experience rather than upon age. Sunday-school departments or large classes, young people's societies, or combinations of both may make use of the program.

2. Effective execution of the plan requires that your group be organized in such a way as to carry out the various activities involved in this particular project. In some cases the general officers already serving will do; in most cases you will find it desirable to have special committees undertake the various portions of the work (see "Specific Group Activities," below). In this way the talents of all your members can be developed, and training in leadership and co-operation secured.

3. The plan provides for two regular meetings each week of the entire group and various items of outside work. You may use your Sunday-evening hour for presentation of informational

material in the form of talks and reports, your Sunday-morning class hour for discussion, and do committee work and other preparation as a mid-week activity. Many groups, of course, will not be able to give so much time each week and will have to make adaptations of the plan to meet their local situation. However, the use of both the morning and evening hours of meeting, available in most churches, in carrying out a unified project would lead to a solution of the vexing problem of correlating the young people's society with the young people's department of the Sunday school. From the standpoint of interest, you will find time to do work between Sundays, provided it seems to you worth while and is necessary to the successful outcome of your chosen purpose.

4. Your group should have a leader or counselor, the amount of whose direct work and guidance will depend upon the ability of the young people themselves to take the lead. Other helpers may be utilized, particularly when an activity requiring expert skill or knowledge is under way. For example, if your group decides to prepare and present the play suggested below (see "Suggested Programs," B), the services of a teacher of English and a dramatic coach will be needed.

A very important law of Christian education will be followed if all such adult helpers in the project are qualified, not only from the standpoint

of efficiency and skill, but particularly in respect to their fine Christian companionableness. In this way the wisely given assistance will play a large part in relating the life of your younger group to that of the adult life of the church.

SPECIFIC GROUP ACTIVITIES, OR SUB-PROJECTS

The various lines of activity open to groups and leaders interested in this project are as follows:

1. Meetings for presentation and discussion of material. While this material may be in the nature of subjects such as those given below (see "Suggested Programs, A. Schedule of Meetings"), it is expected that they will grow out of, and be closely related to, the other activities which your group is undertaking, such as the play, the exhibit, the every-member canvass, etc., described below. In case there is but one meeting each week for this purpose, there should be large opportunity offered for discussion. Too often the talk feature leaves little time for this.

2. Preparation and presentation of one or more of programs. You will, in most cases, wish to present your views upon subjects to your older friends in the church, and these programs will therefore be open to the public. More detailed suggestions regarding two such programs are given

later (see "Suggested Programs," B and C). In the case of the others, the plans are left to local initiative and originality.

3. An exhibit of materials to illustrate further the work which your group is seeking to do for the church. The precise theme and purpose of such an exhibit will depend upon the central activities of the group. It may be:

a) An exhibit of historical material depicting the history of the church, past and present, together with pictures, charts, and the like, showing what other churches are doing and this church should do.

b) A missionary exhibit showing life and problems on the field and the work being done by various benevolent societies and boards.

c) An exhibit which gathers together the facts and ideas discovered by the group in its study and investigation in notebook, picture, or chart form.

4. Indirect and direct participation in the annual every-member canvass of the church. Indirect, but extremely helpful and interesting assistance can be given by preparing and presenting before the church programs illustrating the work of the mission boards, making advertising and educational posters and the exhibit referred to above. All these will help to enlighten the church members and the canvassers. Direct help can be given by aiding in clerical work or acting as junior

members of canvassing teams. Write your denominational board for literature and suggestions on this point.

5. In connection with the project the way may be opened to secure for the young people more adequate representation in the governing bodies of the local church. In many churches there is great need of this. By conference and discussion with a committee representing the official governing body, a plan of representation may be worked out in the Christian spirit so that old and young can democratically and co-operatively work together through the one organization, the church. The converse of the problem may also be studied and plans made for securing the active acceptance on the part of the young people's group of their responsibility of supporting the church in its programs of worship, study, fellowship, and service, including pledges to its budget.

6. There are also additional activities which some groups may find acceptable in their programs, as:

a) Visits to other churches because of their historical significance or to those of other faiths to develop a sense of tolerance and appreciation.

b) Making and dedicating a Christian Flag.

c) Stereopticon lectures on subjects connected with the project as mission work, famous churches, etc.

d) Special study classes in church history, biographies of famous church leaders, comparative religions, missions, or social service. It is quite likely that such studies may be "outcomes" of such a project as the one herein offered and be taken up later.

7. Worship services will naturally be a part of the whole enterprise. The Sunday morning and evening meetings, and the special meetings as well, should have their devotional settings. The worship element can be very effective in the case of such a concluding program as that described under "Suggested Programs," C. Hymns, prayers, and other elements in these devotional services should be chosen in view of their relation and contribution to the central features of the project.

SUGGESTED PROGRAMS

A. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

First week

Sunday morning:	Presentation of the plan. Group organization and appointment of committees
Sunday evening:	Talk: "What Jesus Meant by His Church"
Midweek:	Committee meetings and work on programs

Second week

Sunday morning:	Discussion of topic of previous Sunday evening

Sunday evening: Talk: "A Brief Survey of the History of the Christian Church"
Midweek: Committee meetings and work on programs

Third week

Sunday morning: Discussion of topic of previous Sunday evening
Sunday evening: Talk: "The History of Our Denomination"
Midweek: Committee meetings and work on programs

Fourth week

Sunday morning: Discussion of topic of previous Sunday evening
Sunday evening: Talk: "The History of Our Local Church"
Midweek: Committee meetings and work on programs

Fifth week

Sunday morning: Discussion of topic of previous Sunday evening
Sunday evening: First talk in series: "Present-Day Problems of the Church," on "Creed versus Deed in Religion"
Midweek: Committee meetings and work on programs

Sixth week

Sunday morning: Discussion of topic of previous Sunday evening
Sunday evening: Second talk in series: "Present-Day Problems of the Church," on "Religion and Science"
Midweek: Committee meetings and work on programs

Seventh week

Sunday morning:	Discussion of topic of previous Sunday evening
Sunday evening:	Third talk in series: "Present-Day Problems of the Church," on "Social Issues Calling for Christian Leadership [war, race, industry, etc.]"
Midweek:	Committee meetings and work on programs

Eighth week

Sunday morning:	Discussion of topic of previous Sunday evening
Sunday evening:	Fourth talk in series, "Present-Day Problems of the Church," on "Organizing the Church for Co-operative Action"
Midweek:	Committee meetings and work on programs

Ninth week

Sunday morning:	Discussion of topic of previous Sunday evening
Sunday evening:	Talk: "A Program of Work for Our Church"
Midweek:	Committee meetings and work on programs

Tenth week

Sunday morning:	Discussion of topic of previous Sunday evening
Sunday evening:	Talk: "The Young People's Share in the Work of Our Church"
Midweek:	Committee meetings and work on programs

Eleventh week

Sunday morning: Discussion of topic of previous Sunday evening

Sunday evening: Talk: "The Young People's Share in the Privileges of Our Church"

Midweek: Committee meetings and work on programs

Twelfth week

Sunday morning: Discussion of topic of previous Sunday evening

Sunday evening: Report of committee on "A Young Christian's Statement of Purpose"

Midweek: Exhibit.[1] Committee meetings and work on programs

Thirteenth week

Sunday morning: Discussion of report of previous Sunday evening and adoption of "Statement of Purpose"

Sunday morning or evening (church hour): A Service in charge of the young people. Theme: "Young People and Their Church"

Sunday evening: Round Table Conference: "What We Have Gained from this Project"

Midweek: Play or Pageant[1]

[1] The placing of these features at the times given is purely arbitrary. The play, if at all elaborate, will probably require more extensive preparation and should come later. The exhibit should be timed to precede the every-member canvass and may be held in connection with a midweek meeting of the church, or of the board of canvassers.

B. PLAY OR PAGEANT

1. Whether this dramatic feature of the project will take the form of a play or a pageant is a matter for your group to decide in the light of the materials discovered and talent available. In any case, the outline of scenes below may be suggestive. Possible titles are: "Our Church: Past, Present and Future," "The Church through the Eyes of Youth," "Tomorrow's Challenge to the Church," "Pilgrims, Old and New," etc.

ACT I

Scenes from the past history of the church, such as meetings in which important and critical issues were decided (as votes on temperance, slavery, missions, war, moral issues, etc.), changes in church policy and organization, dedications and rededications, meetings following fires or other catastrophes. Some groups may find it convenient to start with one or more scenes depicting denominational beginnings and then proceed to local scenes.

In setting forth these scenes effort should be made to show how the forefathers served their day and generation even though their views and plans were different from those of today.

ACT II

Scenes from the present life of the church revealing its growth and standing in the community;

the development of new plans and programs as to equipment, interchurch co-operation, and community service; and the outstanding needs and problems which are demanding attention. Meetings may be dramatized in which these questions are being discussed. The aim should be to give the audience an accurate and challenging analysis of the life and problems of the local church.

ACT III

In this portion of the play the group should set their imagination at work to present a constructive picture of their church's life, work, and problems as they will appear ten or twenty years hence, i.e., when the present young people are holding the positions of leadership and responsibility. In this as well as in preceding acts and scenes, emphasis should be laid upon the spiritual and moral leadership of the church as a social institution and the part that young people play, or should play, in its life.

2. In developing this drama, four phases of the work may be noted, namely:

a) *Gathering material.*—Much of this can be secured in connection with the topics suggested for presentation and discussion in the scheduled Sunday meetings. Additional material necessary can be obtained from an investigation of local church and community history. Study of old programs,

church records, interviews with old citizens and church members, literature from denominational boards, and other sources will help to stimulate the imagination of the young people to produce fruitful ideas. In this phase of the work the group counselor must take the lead in setting the group to work.

b) *Organizing the material to form the skeleton of a drama which has a real message.*—In this phase of the work the group and leader may have to call in the assistance of someone skilled in dramatics, but should not relinquish to such an associate the privilege of deciding upon the ideas to be set forth.

c) *Writing the play or pageant.*—This plan will require the joint efforts of the group and its counselor, and also some person skilled in dramatics.

d) *Rehearsing, costuming, and setting the stage.*—In leading this phase of the enterprise the dramatic critic will be the most helpful person.

C. YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR CHURCH[2]

1. An abundance of material for the service should be available from the talks, discussions, and investigations of the group during the preceding weeks. It may be presented in the form of

[2] A service of worship and fellowship planned and conducted by the young people.

talks by specially chosen representatives of the group, and should sum up the attitude and purpose of the young people with regard to their relation to the church. The climax of the service may well be the reading by your secretary of the "Statement of Purpose" which you have prepared and to which you have affixed your signatures.

2. Other elements in the program should also be the work of the group. Writing a prayer, or even a hymn, for the occasion, selecting a fitting Scripture passage, providing special music and acting as ushers, are all features which have excellent educational values for the young people.

3. A communion service may also be added to the program in view of the aim to make the hour one of reverent fellowship between old and young in the church. Such a feature would symbolize the relationship that should prevail in a Christian church among those of all ages and degrees of maturity, as each group endeavors to share with the entire constituency its ideals and attitudes.

4. Since the purpose of such a project as herein suggested is that of providing for "forward steps" by all the young people, it is but natural to expect that there will be some who will desire at this time to join the church formally. If so, such a step should be provided for in the service. However, it should be kept in mind that joining the church is but one of many forward steps, some of

which have already been taken and many of which are still ahead. The plan aims to emphasize this continuity of growth and enlargement of purpose rather than limiting one's entrance into the fellowship to a single ceremony.

INSURING CHRISTIAN-EDUCATION VALUES

It is thought worth while to point out for the benefit of the leader and the group a number of facts to be kept in mind in order that the most significant and lasting results from the standpoint of Christian character development are obtained.

1. Many groups may be tempted to confine their activity to the talks and discussions which are suggested for the Sunday morning and evening sessions. Let it be said that the educational value of such intellectual activities will be greatly curtailed unless they arise from, or at least find close relationship to, such projected activities as the presentation of a play, preparation of an exhibit, assistance in the every-member canvass, or other similar enterprises. It is the participation in these which forms the habits of church loyalty, of service to others, of Christian co-operation, and of accepting responsibility. If one had to abbreviate the total program, consideration of educational values would suggest fewer talks and dis-

cussions and more time given to planning and carrying forward the other activities.

2. Do not follow the outline herein given in a mechanical fashion. It is to guide and stimulate leaders and groups to make their own plans and not be made a substitute for resourceful thinking. The degree to which it is of value will be measured by the extent to which it is adapted to meet local needs and problems. It may be that the use of some of the suggested activities will grow out of some local event or situation. Likewise, it may develop that the course of the project will be in quite another direction from that proposed. The essential points are that the starting-point be a real situation, that the young people participate whole-heartedly, and that a real contribution is made to the church's life.

3. In case the play is made one of the central features of the project, let it be viewed as a real message to the church. The young people should actually feel themselves directed of God as the prophets of old to "forth-tell" his truth. Nor should the desire for a technically finished and artistic presentation outweigh the purpose to present a message. The former is too often the predominating motive. It is hoped that the audience will forget to applaud technical skill because they are thoughtfully impressed by the ideas set forth.

The values to the young people also will be found, not in their dramatic skill, but in their earnestness, thoughtfulness, and humility.

4. In this connection, it may be pointed out that such a project offers an opportunity to arouse a spirit of real worship. This will make it possible for opening devotional services at the morning and evening meetings to be centered about actual needs and avoid the vagueness and abstractness so frequently observed. At other times, also, worship can be naturally entered into. It is not unusual for the actors in a religious drama to preface their performance with a prayer service behind the scenes.

5. Arrange to have the various sub-projects develop in such a way as to produce a climax in the series of experiences. The order suggested in the "Schedule of Meetings" is planned with this purpose. However, in many situations another order may be far more effective. When the discussions, talks, committee work, and other activities are viewed as all contributing to a concluding project of sharing the group's views with the entire church then they take increased value from the motive to help others in the very near future.

6. A large portion of the educational value will be dependent upon the amount of effort put forward by the members of the group. The proj-

ect offers a real test of good leadership. If the group counselor does too much of the work and the younger members passively acquiesce, relatively little value will come to them. The leader will need to prepare himself carefully if he is to draw out the interest and energy of his group.

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REFERENCE AND SOURCE MATERIAL

As will be noted in the foregoing plan, much of the educational value of this project would be lost if all the source material needed were put into text form for study. Both from the standpoint of setting the members of the group to work to find the answers to their problems in life about them and to insure freshness of material, this section is organized somewhat differently than in the case of a text. For the most part it consists of lists of sources classified on the basis of types of material. In addition to the lists of references, some typical examples are given to explain the nature of the help that is available and to start the thinking of the members of the group. The attempt has been made to strike a proper balance between doing the group's work for them and giving no help at all.

It is also difficult to prepare a list of sources which will be adaptable to groups in various denominations and types of local churches. Since the object of this course, however, is to develop intelligent and active loyalty to the church through direct contact with it, it is again emphasized that the best experience is that obtained by the procedures suggested above. First-hand investigation

of local church history, participation in the significant activities of the church, study of periodicals and pamphlets setting forth denominational programs, and the preparation of the "Statement of Purpose" are worth more than mere book study. The general titles given below should be viewed as of secondary value to the rich supply of source material immediately at hand in every local church.

The inclusion of the typical source material has been made possible by the kindness of the several publishing-houses in allowing the quotation of the specified sections from their publications. The author takes this occasion to express his appreciation and thanks.

I. CHURCH HISTORY

Boone, Isley, *The Conquering Christ.* Scribner's.

Gilbert, G. H., *A Short History of Christianity in the Apostolic Age.* University of Chicago Press.

Grant, F. C., *The Early Days of Christianity.* Abingdon Press.

Hutchinson, Paul, *The Spread of Christianity.* Abingdon Press.

Moore, E. C., *The Spread of Christianity in the Modern World.* University of Chicago Press.

Rowe, H. K., *Landmarks in Church History.* Scribner's.

Tucker, R. L., *Builders of the Church* [Biography]. Abingdon Press.

Walker, Williston, *Great Men of the Christian Church* [Biography]. University of Chicago Press.

II. THE BIBLE, FAITH, AND DOCTRINE

Abbott, Lyman, *What Christianity Means to Me.* Macmillan.

Bosworth, Edward I., *What It Means to Be a Christian.* Pilgrim Press.

Brown, Charles R., *The Larger Faith.* Pilgrim Press.

Brown, Charles R., *The Modern Man's Religion.* Macmillan.

Cook, E. A., *Christian Faith for Men of Today.* University of Chicago Press.

Fosdick, Harry E., *The Modern Use of the Bible.* Macmillan.

Sheldon, Frank M., *The Bible in Our Modern World.* Pilgrim Press.

Streibert, Muriel, *Youth and the Bible.* Macmillan.

Swain, R. L., *What and Where Is God?* Macmillan.

There are four ways in which to know the Bible. The first is to be acquainted with its beauty spots, and this, of course, is the way in which the great majority of people know the Book. Some of the choicest narratives in the Old Testament, notably the matchless stories of Joseph, a few of the greatest Psalms, pre-eminently the 23d, select samples of the resonant eloquence of Isaiah, a few of the parables of Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount, some of Paul's supreme passages, especially the 13th chapter of First Corinthians—such is the Bible which most people know.

The second way to know the Bible is to know its individual books. Many a man has vainly struggled to find interest and sense in some sections of the Scripture, like a collection of prophetic sermons in the Old Testament or an epistle in the New, and then, discovering what the book really was about, what kind of man wrote it, to whom he

wrote it, has seen the light break until what was dull and opaque became luminous and clear.

A third way to know the Bible is to know its characters. For the Bible is biography and he who would understand its meaning must familiarly acquaint himself with the men and women who throng its pages and illustrate its truth.

Its men and women must be real people in his imagination and his affection. He must come up to what the Bible says by way of the lives through whom the Bible says it, until Amos the shepherd of Tekoa, or Hosea of the ruined home and broken heart, Peter the vacillating changed to rock, or Paul of the indwelling Christ and the unconquerable passion for the Cross, are his familiar friends.

But indispensable as are these three ways of knowing the Book—its beauty spots, its individual writings, its revealing characters—all of them together are not enough. Only as a man is able to trace up through the whole Scripture the development of its structural ideas does he really know the Bible.

To start with God conceived like a man who walks in a garden in the cool of the day, or as one who comes down from the sky to confuse men's speech lest they should build their tower so high as to reach his home; to know the road that leads out from that beginning until in the New Testament God revealed in Christ is the spiritual Presence in whom we live, and move and have our being, whose name is love, and whose temples are human hearts; and to be able in any book or passage to locate oneself with reference to this progressive revelation of the meaning of God—that is to know the Bible.

From our youth up many of us have been familiar with the phrase "progressive revelation." It is a good phrase. But now the means are in our hands to fill it with

rich, substantial content. Not only can we believe that the Bible does represent a progressive revelation, but we can clearly and in detail watch it progress. We can know where the Scripture's major ideas started; we can trace the routes they took; we can watch them in periods of rapid traveling and in days when the going was difficult and slow. We can enter into their defeats, their hair-breadth escapes, and costly victories; and we can see the way the Gospel of Jesus carried them up to a great height "not to destroy, but to fulfil."

That is the new approach to the Bible.

Certain results follow from this approach which ought to give relief to the thought, and power to the work, of every preacher who uses it.

For one thing, we are saved by it from the old and impossible attempt to harmonize the Bible with itself, to make it speak with unanimous voice, to resolve its conflicts and contradictions into a strained and artificial unity. How could one suppose that such internal harmony ever could be achieved between writings so vital and real, springing hot out of the life of the generations that gave them being, and extending in their composition over at least twelve hundred years?

The task of harmonizing such ethical conceptions with the Sermon on the Mount surely is too much for human wit or patience. The Old Testament exhibits many attitudes indulged in by men and ascribed to God which represent early stages in a great development, and it is alike intellectually ruinous and morally debilitating to endeavor to harmonize those early ideals with the revelations of the great prophets and the Gospels. Rather, the method of Jesus is obviously applicable: "It was said to them of old time but I say unto you."

Moreover, the new approach to the Bible saves us

from the necessity of apologizing for immature stages in the development of the Biblical revelation. From the beginning of the church many things in the early documents have been a stumbling-block to the faithful. It gives to us a comprehensive, inclusive view of the Scriptures and enables us to see them, not piecemeal, but as a whole. Those of us who accept the modern knowledge of the Bible as assured and endeavor to put it to good use are continually being accused of tearing the Book to pieces, of cutting out this or that, and of leaving a mere tattered patchwork of what was once a glorious unity. The fact is precisely the opposite. The new approach to the Bible once more integrates the Scriptures, saves us from our piecemeal treatment of them, and restores to us the whole book seen as a unified development from early and simple beginnings to a great conclusion.

This, then, is the conclusion of the matter. It is impossible that a Book written two to three thousand years ago should be used in the twentieth century A.D. without having some of its forms of thought and speech translated into modern categories. When, therefore, a man says, I believe in the immortality of the soul but not in the resurrection of the flesh, I believe in the victory of God on earth but not in the physical return of Jesus, I believe in the reality of sin and evil but not in the visitation of demons, I believe in the nearness and friendship of the divine Spirit but I do not think of that experience in terms of individual angels, only superficial dogmatism can deny that that man believes the Bible. It is precisely the thing at which the Bible was driving that he does believe. Life eternal, the coming of the kingdom, the conquest of sin and evil, the indwelling and sustaining presence of the Spirit—these are the gist of the matter once set forth in ancient terms, but abidingly valid in our terms too, and

valid also in other terms than ours in which our children's children may express them.—HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK, *The Modern Use of the Bible.*[3]

The following creed formulated and adopted by the young people of South Congregational Church, Concord, New Hampshire, is an illustration of the new approach suggested in this plan for receiving younger persons into the church fellowship. This statement was worked out in a series of Lenten conferences with the pastor in which the joy of creating something of their own stimulated the members of the group to real thinking. The church committee were almost overcome when asked if they would receive the prospective members on their own statement of faith, but in the face of the serious attitudes of the young people, willingly acceded to their request:

God.—We believe in God, the Supreme Being who rules over all, the Creator of the universe and all life therein, the loving Father, the Protector, and the Councillor.

Jesus Christ.—We believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the Saviour of men, the Agent of God who taught man the ways of God and good-will towards men, and who died on the cross to prove the depth of God's love for man.

Holy Spirit.—We believe that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of God, the Spirit that descends on Jesus, the Spirit behind conscience which counsels and directs us, and the Spirit animating all sincere worship of God.

Church.—We believe that the Church is a union of the

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followers of Christ existing for the purpose of teaching people to live Christ-like lives, and we believe that our relationship to the Church is such as to require of us that we support it financially, believe in its creed, further its purpose and aims, attend it regularly, and actually try to *live a Christian life.*

Creation of the Universe.—We believe that the universe has been created and is being created by God according to the Creator's laws, and presumably will last forever.

Immortality.—Due to our conception of God and a certain instinctive faith, we believe in the survival of the spirit—in a life with God where justice is done.

Bible.—We believe that the Bible contains the teachings of God as they were interpreted and written by men, and form a religious standard for Christians.

To be a Christian.—We believe that to be a Christian is to believe in God and the Bible, and try to meet our own problems of life in the same high spirit in which Jesus met His problems, and to extend throughout school and community the highest standards of Christian character.

III. MEANING AND TASK OF THE MODERN CHURCH

Calkins, Raymond, *The Christian Church in the Modern World.* Macmillan.

Committee on the War and the Religious Outlook. Five volumes published by the Association Press:
Religion among American Men.
The Missionary Outlook in the Light of the War.
The Church and Industrial Reconstruction.
Christian Unity: Its Principles and Possibilities.
The Teaching Work of the Church.

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SEEKING THE WAY

No one will question that there has been an alarming lowering of general standards during the past few years. There are few who will deny that the churches might do much more than they are now doing to turn people from evil to good. It is high time some inquiry was made as to what ails the churches. Are they indeed "losing out to jazz"?

Certainly a change has come over them. And this has been partly voluntary. Soon after the war an American journalist, now managing editor of one of the most important dailies of the Middle West, was assigned to write a series of articles on what American churches were doing. On this task he traveled through many States, being cordially received wherever he presented himself. He visited parishes and central offices of great denominations. He was shown charts, pamphlets, form letters, plans for conducting drives. He found great interest in the mechanics of lifting mortgages, raising endowments and providing for budgets.

He saw sets of offices in which were ranged alert executives in charge of departmental work.

The conclusion this journalist reached is given in his own words: "Somebody has sold the churches efficiency, but has not sold them anything else." What he had failed to find in satisfactory quantity was the something else which he had expected to encounter in an investigation of things religious.

Perhaps this newspaperman was expecting a good deal when he was disappointed at evidences that many of the managers of church affairs looked upon their enterprises as so many business concerns. He would have liked to catch breaths of an atmosphere less of this earth, to have heard a Savonarola proclaiming his allegiance to things eternal in a voice bringing a great city to its knees, or to have met a modern Francis of Assisi espoused to his Lady Poverty. The "something else" which he missed is not to be produced by any perfection of organization, but by a spirit moving through the lives of men.

There are modern saints, many in every city, a few in every neighborhood, but the thing which distressed the reporter was that the great central offices through which he passed were not set to produce saints. Their obvious purpose was to imitate business organizations contrived for necessary but somewhat different ends.

The nature of mankind has responded in former ages to undiluted religious appeals, even though worshipers were obliged to go down into cellars and tombs for worship, as was done when Christianity was gaining converts in ancient Rome. The Wesleys preached to thousands in the open fields, and in countless other periods it was shown that the spirit of religion was not dependent on gorgeous temples made with hands or on any elaborate fittings.

Perhaps the churches have not been bold enough in re-

cent years. In an age of tremendous organization it may be that some of the responsible leaders have been content to follow and take advice from those who were not headed in the same direction.

If a church is to stand forth in its full glory, it must be as leader and not as follower. It must be itself, and not make any attempt to be somebody else. Many people are today listening for a voice that will carry conviction—one that will speak from inward certitude.

The churches have been trying out efficiency, which is necessary, of course, but not a fulfillment of what they believe to be their commission. When they again make themselves the teachers of multitudes it must be in their essential character, as bringers of tidings without which men perish, as prophets of the Eternal.—Editorial, *Boston Globe.*

The extent to which the Church as an institution shall itself engage in practical activities of social betterment is one which cannot be answered by a generalization. This must necessarily be determined in large measure by the special conditions in which a given church finds itself. Every local church should have its own forms of social ministry, which it carries on in the interest of the community welfare, and the particular conditions in certain communities may lay upon the church the responsibility for a great program of practical service. Certainly if there are human needs which are not being met by other agencies, they present to the church a clear call either to undertake a program of special effort in its own name or to see that other means of meeting the need are called into being.

The distinctive function of the Church, however, in the securing of a better social order does not lie in a multitude of independent administrative efforts, but in being the never-ceasing inspiration of such efforts by all Christian

men in their various capacities as employers, employees, or socially-minded citizens. The Church should by its preaching so effectively hold up the Christian ideal, and make so clear what is involved in its application to the existing social conditions of the present day, that it will be constantly sending out its members to give themselves whole-heartedly to social betterment and thus be the great dynamic of a host of practical endeavors toward a more Christian society.—COMMITTEE ON THE WAR AND THE RELIGIOUS OUTLOOK, *The Church and Industrial Reconstruction,* pp. 233, 234. Association Press.

The Church's educational purpose cannot be accomplished by short cuts—by the study of the facts of Biblical history, by the memorization of texts, by a term of indoctrination in a pastor's class, or by other schemes for imparting religious information. All of these may be good in their place; but they are only parts, and cannot constitute the whole. Religious education means growth in Christian living through guided experience therein. It means the development of Christian attitudes, Christian purposes, Christian standards of conduct, Christian convictions, a Christian way of life in each succeeding stage of the enlarging experience of childhood, youth, and maturity. The fulfilment of the Church's educational purpose requires nothing less than continuous fellowship in the whole of its life and work.

The converse of this is that all of the Church's life and work, as a whole and in its various parts, may properly be tested and evaluated in the light of its teaching purpose. Does this or that item of its program contribute as it should to the realization of that aim? Is the preaching from its pulpit, for example, a disconnected string of oratorical efforts upon passing topics of the day or such as

builds people up in the knowledge and love of God? Does its public worship bring the congregation into the presence of God, and open their minds and hearts to His love and truth? Does it give them a clearer vision of what the Kingdom of God means for our industrial and social and international life and send them out with a new determination to work for it? Do people come to this particular Church to learn, to serve, and to grow, or to be coddled in spirit and confirmed in their prejudices? Is its evangelism of the spasmodic, crowd-psychology type, or constant, sustained, and constructive? Does it merely "give to missions," or is it really interested in extending its fellowship, in intelligent and sympathetic fashion, to its brothers in foreign lands? Does its philanthropy involve paternalism or fellowship? Is its social service institutional only or personal?—COMMITTEE ON THE WAR AND THE RELIGIOUS OUTLOOK, *The Teaching Work of the Church,* pp. 42, 43. Association Press.

A SOCIAL CREED OF THE CHURCHES

We believe in taking Jesus in earnest, making His social and spiritual ideals our test for community as well as for individual life. We believe in strengthening and deepening the inner personal relationship of the individual with God, and recognizing his obligation and duty to society. This is crystallized in the two commandments of Jesus: "Love thy God and love thy neighbor." We believe this pattern ideal for a Christian social order involves the recognition of the sacredness of life, the supreme worth of each single personality, and our common membership in one another—the brotherhood of all. In short, it means creative activity in co-operation with our fellow human beings, and with God, in the everyday life of society and in the development of a new and better world social order.

Translating this ideal

1. Into education means:
 a) The building of a social order in which every child has the best opportunity for development.
 b) Adequate and equal educational opportunity for all, with the possibility of extended training for those competent.
 c) A thorough and scientific program of religious education designed to help Christianize everyday life and conduct.
 d) Conservation of health, including careful instruction in sex hygiene and home building, abundant and wholesome recreation facilities, and education for leisure, including a nation-wide system of adult education.
 e) Insistence on constitutional rights and duties, including freedom of speech, of the press, and of peaceable assemblage.
 f) Constructive education and Christian care of dependents, defectives and delinquents, in order to restore them to normal life whenever possible, but with kindly segregation for those who are hopelessly feeble-minded. (This means that such institutions as the jails, prisons, and orphan asylums should be so conducted as to be genuine centers for education and health.)
 g) A scientifically planned program of international education promoting peace and good-will and exposing the evils of war, liquor, illiteracy, and other social sins.
2. Into industry and economic relationships means:
 a) A reciprocity of service—that group interests, whether of labor or capital, must always be subordinated

to the welfare of the nation as a whole, and that society in its turn must insure justice to each group.

b) A frank abandonment of all efforts to secure unearned income, that is, reward which does not come from a real service.

c) Recognition that all ownership is a social trust involving Christian administration for the good of all and that the unlimited right of private ownership is un-Christian.

d) Abolishing child labor and raising the legal age limits to insure maximum physical, intellectual, and moral development.

e) Freedom from employment one day in seven.

f) The eight-hour day as the present maximum for all industrial workers, and a reduction to the lowest point that is scientifically necessary to produce all the goods we need.

g) Providing safe and sanitary industrial conditions especially protecting women.

h) Adequate accident, sickness, and unemployment insurance, together with suitable provision for old age.

i) An effective national system of public employment bureaus to make possible the proper distribution of the labor forces of America.

j) That the first charge upon industry should be a minimum comfort wage, which will enable all the children of the workers to become the most effective Christian citizens.

k) Adequate provision for impartial investigation and publicity, conciliation, and arbitration in industrial disputes.

l) The right of labor to organize with representatives of their own choosing, and to a fair share in the management.

m) Encouragement of the organization of consumers' co-operatives for the more equitable distribution of the essentials of life.

n) The supremacy of the service, rather than the profit motive in the acquisition and use of property on the part of both labor and capital, and the most equitable division of the product of industry that can be devised.

3. Into agriculture means:

a) That the farmer shall have access to the land he works on such terms as will ensure him personal freedom and economic encouragement, while society is amply protected by efficient production and conservation of fertility.

b) That the cost of market distribution from farmer to consumer shall be cut to the lowest possible terms, both farmers and consumers sharing in these economies.

c) That there shall be every encouragement to the organization of farmers for economic ends, particularly for co-operative sales and purchases.

d) That an efficient system of both vocational and general education of youths and adults living on farms shall be available.

e) That special efforts shall be made to ensure the farmer adequate social institutions, including the church, the school, the library, means of recreation, good local government, and particularly the best possible farm home.

f) That there shall be a widespread development of organized rural communities, thoroughly democratic, completely co-operative, and possessed with the spirit of the common welfare.

g) That there shall be the fullest measure of friendly

reciprocal co-operation between the rural and city workers.

4. Into racial relations means:
 a) The same protection and rights for other races in America that we ourselves enjoy, especially legislation against lynching.
 b) Eliminating racial discrimination, and substituting full brotherly treatment for all races in America.
 c) The fullest co-operation between the churches of various races, even though of different denominations.
 d) Special educational and social equipment for immigrants, with government information bureaus.
5. Into international relations means:
 a) The removal of every unjust barrier of trade, color, creed, and race, and the practice of equal justice for all nations.
 b) The administration of the property and privileges within each country so that they will be of the greatest benefit not only to that nation but to all the world.
 c) The replacement of the old practices of secret diplomacy and secret treaties by open methods and recorded agreements.
 d) A permanent association of the nations for world peace and good-will, the outlawry of war, and the settling of all differences between nations by conference, arbitration, or in an international court.
 e) The replacement of selfish imperialism by such disinterested treatment of backward nations as to contribute the maximum to the welfare of each and of all the world.
 f) The abolition of military armanents by all nations except for a small police force.
 g) The withdrawal of the church as an institution from

the support of war in any form. (This would still leave the individual free to do as his conscience dictates.)

We believe that it is only as our churches themselves practise the Jesus Way-of-Life in the fullest sense—translating these social standards into the daily life of the church and the community—that we can ever hope to build the Democracy of God on earth.—Proposed by the COMMISSION ON SOCIAL SERVICE OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES as a basis of discussion at the National Council Meeting, Washington, D.C., October, 1925.

A PUBLIC CONSCIENCE

During a session of the conference on opium a missionary was denounced by one of the official delegates who declared that the missionary had exceeded the limits of courtesy. The missionary, whose life is devoted to an attempt at helping people escape the living death that opium imposes, had declared that the people of India as a whole wished to restrict the drug to medical and scientific uses.

Apparently the missionary conceived of his office in society as akin to that of the conscience in a human being. Those who have gained an acquaintance with conscience know that it is a rough something that cannot be called polite. It penetrates shams, tears away masks, and has a way of telling the truth so that it hurts. Any conscience doing less is unworthy of the name.

Much is being said about the change in the functions of the ministry. It is pointed out that a few generations ago the men who occupied pulpits of a Sunday were charged with a variety of functions, most of which have been taken over by other agencies.

There is, however, a field in which men dedicated to the things of the spirit can have as their own, if they but

enter in and take possession. They may become the public consciences of their communities, aiming to stir bodies of people to higher purposes, to lift them from the sordidness of the race for money, to rescue them from the tinsel world in which they seek amusement.

Every now and then a minister of religion, sometimes in one church, sometimes in another, dares to be what the man on the street expects him to be. Popularity does not always follow, as the conscience is not exactly a popular organ. But there is respect and the voice is heard. Our lives, both public and private, are the healthier for constructive criticism. Unless they are subjected to something of the sort they are almost certain to grow worse rather than better.

There are always a few ministers who take their positions on the highest ground and never leave it. There are never likely to be too many such for the good of the world. A community, just like an individual, needs a conscience that works. Whoever qualifies himself for this office and speaks out without fear or favor becomes a healer of the spirit.—Editorial, *Boston Globe.*

IV. MATERIAL ON SPECIFIC PROBLEMS

The work which the church is challenged to do, and is in part accomplishing in the case of such problems as missions, world-peace, social service, industrial democracy, and the like, would require too great a list of books. The leader should consult his denominational departments and other agencies in charge of these specific tasks.

In the case of particular denominational problems, use should be made of whatever material is

available, such as church manuals, catechisms, yearbooks, histories and biographies, reports of boards and societies, charts, maps, etc. Much free literature can be obtained by writing to denominational headquarters.

V. WHAT YOUTH THINKS ABOUT THE CHURCH

Every group should be familiar with the work being done by the young people of their denomination. What the present student generation of Christian young people are thinking is shown in the report of the last quadrennial convention of the Student Volunteer Movement at Indianapolis as well as in four pamphlet discussion courses prepared and used in college discussion groups preliminary to the convention, namely, *Youth and Renaissance Movements; Economic Problems and the Christian Ideal,* and *Racial Relations and the Christian Ideal,* all by the Committee on Christian World Education; and *International Problems and the Christian Way of Life,* by the National Conference on the Christian Way of Life. Another reflection of the intense Christian ideals of the young people of today is found in the book, *Through the Eyes of Youth,* published by the Abingdon Press. It contains a verbatim account of the addresses delivered at the conference of Methodist young people at Louisville.

WHAT I WANT FROM THE CHURCH[4]

The subject I'm to speak on is a hard one. Hard for this reason, there are so many things that I want from the church that I had a hard time choosing among them. There is something radically wrong with the church, otherwise the young people would like to go there. We manage to enjoy school, in spite of the grind and work; the schools have managed to make their work attractive. And I am going to show where the church has failed in comparison with the schools.

There are some things which this church in particular lacks. I shall speak of those first, then go on to the subject of what churches in general lack. First, there is the matter of room. Young people like plenty of it; they are used to it; they demand it. At our high school new additions have just been made. The school board recognizes the fact that students require room if they are to do their best work. But does any one look forward to coming to the church to classes and meeting as one class does in the upstairs hallway, where all the noise reaches them, drafts come up from the front door, and some one is continually crawling over them to get into the adjacent room?

Another thing which is really so obvious that it hardly needs mentioning is the matter of socials. We need more of them. One reason why we haven't had more is because those we have held have not been much of a success. If they had been very successful, popular opinion would have demanded more, and we would have had them. Now there are two reasons why they haven't been a success. Invariably the night picked for a social is one on which some big school event is scheduled. Tonight for instance, there is a

[4] At a banquet of the high-school department of the church school, two young people were asked to speak on this subject. These are the remarks made by one of the young people.

big basketball game on. I wanted to see it. All of us did. And a good many went; the rest of you have for reasons of your own chosen to come here. To tell the truth, if I hadn't promised to speak before I knew of the game I wouldn't be here. This ought to be avoided. Another reason for lack of success is this: we can't start any plan without the help and advice of our teachers. But our teachers have other interests, outside work, that demand their time. They can't be bothered. But at school we can always get a hearing from any teacher at almost any time.

That is the whole thing. What we are used to at school, we find lacking in the church. The atmosphere of the church is entirely different from the atmosphere we are accustomed to at school and at home. It was aptly stated by one of my teachers at school that "the eighteenth century freed men, the nineteenth century freed women, and the twentieth century freed children." We children have been allowed to do every conceivable thing within the last twenty years: we run a magazine board, we govern our schools by a student council, we finance theatricals. In the homes and schools the child has become the center of interest. Here is my point, when we enter the church what happens? We enter the place where our elders rule. We don't understand it. We are no longer the center of interest. There is no longer use for our initiative. Our writers, speakers, actors, cartoonists, what use is there for them? Of course we have an occasional play. And they have been huge successes. Why not? We did the work. But at school we have something on all the time. Not once a year but once a week or more. We need an outlet for our initiative. The church needs to recognize that we possess it. It is behind the times. Let them ask the schools how they are run. They will find the students run them, and perhaps as successfully as our elders run the church!

Because of this difference in atmosphere, though we join the church with enthusiasm, we soon become lukewarm. We actually become hypocrites. We are forever trying to be that which we are not. What I have been trying to say is this: Most of these reforms cannot be instituted by our elders. Many of them can help us, back us up, but it's time that you, the young people of our church, took the lead. It's up to you. What are you going to do about it? — EIGHTEEN-YEAR-OLD HIGH-SCHOOL SENIOR, *Church School,* August, 1924.

WHAT YOUTH THINKS

A church in New York City invited some young people Sunday to tell their elders what youth is thinking about them. It was a daring experiment, and inasmuch as frankness is one of youth's potent qualities, it produced some very excellent results. A young man stepped into the pulpit.

"The only way to teach us anything," he explained to the grave seniors who composed the congregation, "is not to tell us what to do, but to set us an example." Youth, he went on, doesn't find its love for jazz and irrepressible ways of living in its own head, but from observing what its elders are up to. And he closed his remarks with this profoundly acute suggestion: that the level of American life will be raised not by parental "don'ts" but by an effort on the part of the older folks to illustrate life to youth by living affirmatives.

Here was the parable of the beam and the eye with a vengeance. It is a restatement of that hoary truth which merits examination. Everywhere one hears sententious elders expressing alarm about the ways of youth and the prospects of civilization, because youth seems to be what it is. But how about pausing a moment to look about and see just what the elders are offering youth by way of exam-

ple? And what does youth see? It sees "success" (meaning money and power over material things) represented as the motto of American life. It sees education run increasingly upon the theory that it should train men to become successful rather than to be well-grounded, well-balanced, thinking individuals. And, seeing all this, youth recalls that this same scramble for possessions and power, indulged in by "practical people," has landed the world in the worst morass in the history of modern times. Small wonder that youth suggests a few affirmative examples of living are now in order among the claimants of power."—Editorial, *Boston Globe,* February, 1925.

IS OUR CHURCH NECESSARY?[5]

The question of how great an influence our church exerts was taken up by about forty young people of high school age in a department of our church school. Their first step in answering the question was to go among prominent people in our town and interview them for their opinions as to the importance of our church to the interests of their work. Then each individual in the department expressed briefly whether he thought our church necessary and what its influence had been on him. Next, a committee of five met to gather together the material which had been brought in. As they discussed this material they found that it fell into three groups under the heads of the indi-

[5] This essay, submitted by the Senior Department of the Court Street Methodist Episcopal Church, Rockford, Illinois, was awarded first prize in a contest conducted by the Religious Education Association in 1925 for young people of high-school age upon the subject, "Does It Make Any Difference to Our Town Whether or Not the Church Continues Its Sunday Services and Other Activities?"—Reprinted from *Religious Education,* June, 1925.

vidual, the home, and the community, each of which was taken up separately.

That our church affects the lives of all of us individually was a point emphasized. In a church are met people who are trying to lead clean lives, for otherwise they would not be prompted to attend such an institution. Religious training inspires right living and clean thinking, helps one to be honest in everything he does, increases self-control, better understanding of the foreign born, and urges obedience of the law.

In our Sunday school our religious sense is developed. This is done by making a study of the Bible and teaching about characters who have influenced civilization and therefore are the best kind of ideals for us to have. The worship services in the church develop the mind along new lines of thought. Then, too, the church is the influence which helps our inner life, for depth and thoughtfulness are encouraged by talking over spiritual matters.

We have beautiful hymns and anthems in our church, suited for every age and type of person, which are capable of carrying inspiration that perhaps other mediums might not be able to do. The organ music, in itself, also is helpful to worship. Prayer is, perhaps, the greatest help because it makes for depth of spirituality that furnishes a background for character and personality, in other words, for our inner life. Our church teaches us that this inner life helps make us ready for service when the opportunity comes.

Some of the young people considered the effect upon the individual closely allied with the effect upon the home since the latter is made up of individuals. They carry the ideals from the church to the home, making the atmosphere more pleasant there from the benefits they have gained from the church. Several persons stated that the church

influence made them more thoughtful and considerate of others at home and this was important in that way.

It was agreed generally among the young people that our church is a great factor in promoting the right kind of recreation.

One of the church's chief values is the opportunity it gives for making friends, true friends, the kind who will "stick." In asking opinions on this matter many were those who spoke of the friendships which they had gained through this medium.

Our church offers such a variety of assets in the way of recreation that these friendships may be developed pleasurably since there is so much chance for contact with one's friends.

The class work of the church school section of this institution is of primary interest. Organized classes, outside meetings, social gatherings, and planned philanthropic work, all bring the members together creating a spirit of friendliness and helpfulness. The church influence is great here in its power of developing character through this social means. For these groups have the altruistic spirit of helping one another. Even the children in the lower departments are developing a spirit of unselfishness and brotherliness through definite missionary instruction and training.

Then there is the gymnasium, splendidly equipped with apparatus and in charge of an experienced and capable instructor. No restrictions as to creed are observed, but the law of playing square is always enforced. Thus, with physical development and recreation we again find character development which is the essential of good citizenship.

In connection with the "gym" two clubs were formed, one for the girls and one for boys. These hold regular meetings and in the summer hold camps at suitable lakes. The boys' camp, which is the one of older origin, is carried

on by the Four Square Method, physical, mental, moral, and social sides being equally cared for. Splendid opportunities are to be had there for all lines of sports are involved, mixers around camp-fires, and on hikes, morning devotions as well as Sunday services, and instructive lectures and tree hikes,—all part of the well-rounded program. The girls' camp is on much the same pattern as the boys', only those activities being more suited to girl life are substituted for some of those used by the boys. This part of our church is considered one of the greatest helps both to the individual and to the community.

Two very active troops of Boy Scouts in our church are doing very positive building in Christian character and citizenship in the lives of a large group of boys. They are the pioneer Scout groups in our town and have been a large factor in developing this work among hundreds of boys. Their all-year program cares for the leisure time of many boys in a very helpful manner.

Among the other organizations are the dramatic club and chorus. Arts and talents are encouraged, the participants deriving real benefits from the efficient supervisors and friendly relations with the other members. Missionary societies and a Dorcas Society are organized for the older members of our church.

Our missionary work helps the people of our town when they are in need and encourages them. It does this by way of showing these people how to help themselves until they may get on their feet, always doing this with the spirit of love behind its efforts. It backs the work of a community church which works among the poor and furnishes helpers for it.

Our church had a school for Chinese to make them familiar with our language and American customs. A reading room with current magazines and books, rest rooms, and

telephones are all at the disposal of those wishing to use them.

We feel that our church is the great instrument for good in the community. It is evident that the church raises the moral standard of a community. Without the church the Y.W.C.A., the W.C.T.U., and similar organizations could not exist unless there was some other instrument of good to back them. They depend on the churches, our church being included.

The State's Attorney stated that our church does help raise the moral standard and back law enforcement. Police women acknowledged its good and commended our church, but added that we could do even more for the community with our gymnasium.

One of the greatest benefits for which our church is responsible is that of creating in the individuals of the community a faith in both themselves and in God. Our very livelihood is based upon faith, for it is necessary for us to trust one another, to live by the Golden Rule. If each person had perfect trust there could be no discord. The employer and the employee must trust each other. The same feeling must exist between nations.

Our church teaches us through the encouragement of our pastor to think of world problems and our responsibility toward all people. It shows us that real missionary work further law making and enforcement that strive in a big way to make people's lives happier and more useful. This we do by backing such propositions as world peace, the abolition of child labor, and prohibition.

One does not realize how much the church is connected with his life and other lives and the destiny of the world until there enters one's mind the possibility of losing its stable influence.

VI. HOW LEADERS INTERPRET YOUTH'S PLACE IN THE CHURCH

YOUTH AND THE CHURCH

The other day the Rev. Edwin W. Bishop, of Lansing, Michigan, preached a sermon in which he challenged his church to put a youth, representative of the youth of the congregation, upon the board of trustees and the Prudential Committee. If a corresponding proposal were made and accepted in every church, what changes would result in religious life and church efficiency?

One can guess what the response would be, at first, in nine cases out of ten, as soon as the full purport of the proposal was realized. For it goes counter to church tradition, which assumes that of course the part of youth is to accept what the ancient institution offers them; it goes counter, also, to custom in almost every field.

What is the wisest sort of move that the churches ever made with respect to youth? Is it not the encouragement of "self-expression through young people's societies, self-governing adolescent departments of the church school," and the like? Does anyone who knows this recent history have the slightest doubt that where the church secures from the young people themselves the largest degree of initiative, there the church shows the greatest wisdom?

Can the young people develop their spiritual powers to the maximum in a segregated department of their own? On the other hand, can adults, in their department, achieve the wisdom that is necessary for managing ecclesiastical affairs as a whole? Some specialization of functions can be taken for granted, of course, and likewise inequality of responsibility as between youth and maturity. But have we found the right specialization and the right division of responsibilities?

If you want a child to grow in ability to add, you do not have him add easy columns over and over; you lead him to attempt ever harder and harder columns until the hardest is within his power. We know, similarly, that judgment grows by being exercised near the outer boundaries of experience. Thus, good judgment in the use of money comes only by using money, and it grows by increasing the amount that is risked upon one's choices. Growth of character requires expansion and diversification of contacts with men and with conditions; you could not produce firm character within the walls of a school taken by itself. Just so, the religious growth of the young suffers arrest unless there is constant movement outward from any age-restricted group. Our spiritual apprehension increases by taking wider and wider views of the function of religion; our ability to carry responsibilities grows by carrying responsibilities that really test us. The best proof of the vitality and worth of a youth department, therefore, would be a tendency of the young people to assume functions that outrun the department—to participate, that is, in activities that now are usually assigned to the mature. The boxed-in idea is an educational fallacy.

Sorry is the plight of any church in which the young people do not sit in judgment upon general policies and upon official acts of minister, church board, committee on religious education—yes, the whole policy and administration of the denomination. The recent convention of Presbyterian students who frankly said what they thought of the Westminster doctrines ought to be regarded as normal, quite so. If we adults cannot take it as normal, then something in us is out of order. Is it not absurd that passivity of high school and college students with respect to doctrine awakens in us no sense of danger, whereas the use of their growing intellects gives us the shivers? The Volunteers at

Indianapolis, and the Methodist students at Louisville, when they thrust their hands into the large issues of religion and of the churches, exercised the proper and desirable functions of youth.

Not only is the surge of youth into the adult domain wholesome for the youths concerned; we adults cannot dispense with the supplementation that is offered us. Especially in religion do we need it. For here conventionality is deadly—conventionality of either belief, worship, personal religious experience, or conduct. Here, above all other areas of life, creativeness is the core of efficiency. This means risking everything, with God, on behalf of unprecedented good. It requires the almost reckless daring that comes naturally to youth, but in maturity fades, too often, into mechanized habit and repetitious thinking.

I will not press further the hint already given that we adults should be humble when we contemplate the way we have run the world thus far; let us, rather, lift our eyes to the tasks that are just ahead. What sort of men and women does the new age demand? Unprecedented sorts all 'round: An unprecedented kind of missionary to fit the new emergency in missions; an unprecedented combination of thinker, educator, and prophet in the pastorate; new types of ministry, as in religious education; denominational leaders who will lead out of denominationalism; educators who, without abating scientific zeal and technical specialization, know how to make Christian life purposes dominate education; parents who will make the necessary experiments in rebuilding the Christian home; business and professional men and women who will pay the price of humanizing our industrial order; citizens who will really believe—what few ever yet have believed—that the world actually can be run as a co-operative brotherhood.

Youth conventions, societies, and periodicals can help

mightily towards such creative churchmanship. But the movement must be carried also into the everyday life of the local church. Here lies the significance of the incident at Lansing. Mr. Bishop's proposal represents sound religious education, and likewise common-sense administration. And the point is not that young people should be "recognized" by having one of their number in the church board, but that they should effectively participate, actually "count," in the control.—GEORGE A. COE, *Northwestern Christian Advocate,* April 16, 1925.

WHAT YOUTH DEMANDS OF THE CHURCH

Young people disagree about the church just as their elders do. Some of them find value in the symbolic service of our ritualistic churches; others will not tolerate what seems to them to be meaningless adornment. Some are crusaders for a conservative faith, rivaling Mr. Bryan in his attacks upon liberalism; others are impatient with anything that is older than to-day. Some are openly hostile to the church, some are tolerant of it, some are indifferent and others are its staunch defenders.

But regardless of theology, of denominational affiliation or of their attachment or aloofness to the church, young people agree in insisting that there are some things very much wrong with the church, and that there are certain respects in which the church needs to change its attitude if it is to have the complete approval of young life. A few of these points of criticism may here be set down for the benefit of the elders in the church.

Youth wants age to treat its opinions as worthy of full respect and consideration. Young people want to be considered as having arrived at a point of intelligence and capability which entitles them to be heard—to be heard as individuals, as members of the church family. Youth does

not want condescension; it despises the patronizing air as much as it dislikes either the tolerant or intolerant disrespect for the opinions of youth.

It has been too much the habit of parents to treat the opinions of high school people as though they needed to be discounted anywhere from twenty-five to seventy-five per cent. Older folks have great difficulty in realizing that their children have grown up; they seem not to be aware that these young people are doing their own thinking in high school and in business and need to do it both in the home and in the church. Eighteen-year-old John Smith wants Deacon Brown to talk to him as though John Smith were the equal of Deacon Brown, as though the opinions of John Smith were of equal value with those of Deacon Brown. The Deacon may have maturity and experience to back his view-points, but the young man may have vision and faith and freshness to supplement the seasoned wisdom of age.

This carries with it the idea that young people want to bear important responsibilities in service. The impression is current that the church is pretty much an old folks' institution, that it is officered and directed entirely by those of middle age or beyond. There is no reason why this should be true. It is rank injustice to youth when a church makes up its committees and official board entirely of those in the thirties and over. Such a church does not represent the families—it represents only part of the families. It can not minister effectively to young people if it goes along on this basis.

It is not enough to say to the young people that they may have their own department or society in which they may function, any more than it is deemed sufficient to say to the women that they may have their own "Aid Society" in which they may work. If youth is going to be much interested in the church it must be fully recognized as part of

the entire church family, and this family must treat youth as respectfully as it is accustomed to being treated in high school or in the business world.

Youth demands that the church be busy about important affairs. It has little time for organizations seeking merely to revive the ancient or to keep alive the institution for the sake of its past record. Some of our youth may be defenders of the theology of the Middle Ages, but they are defenders in terms of to-day. They fight modernism because they believe it will have a ruinous effect upon the life of to-day and to-morrow. That is to say, they face the present and future and are interested in a church which talks the language of twentieth century America rather than of scribal Palestine.

Young people, when given opportunity, criticize frankly the modern service of worship. They say that the ministers pray too long, that they pray about things which young folks don't understand and don't need to study about. They say that sermons are about matters which have no connection with the experiences of the week. They say that many of the lessons for the church school and for certain young people's societies are too far removed from their daily experience to justify the expense of any time in thinking about them.

And as with the subjects which middle age considers, so with the programs projected by some churches. Youth wants to spend little time in merely keeping the body and soul of the church together. It says frankly that if there isn't enough energy in an institution to make it live, it is unwise to be eternally employing pulmotors and to resort to transfusion of blood. Sometimes youth is quite cruel in this matter; sometimes it is sympathetic; but always it insists that an institution which deserves to live is one so busy about the practical needs of community and world life that

it hasn't much time to be thinking about its own aches. The theory of youth is that the aches will disappear if the church takes sufficient exercise by properly serving humanity. Almost any church can enlist the vigorous energy of its youth by undertaking some difficult and needed task of social betterment and by sharing responsibility for its accomplishment with the young life.

The revolt of youth is not merely destructive. It wants to build, and it wants to build along with older folks if only older people will let young folks join in constructing something really worth while.—HARRY THOMAS STOCK, *Onward* [*Universalist*], October 12, 1923.

YOUTH'S HOUR IN THE CHURCHES

Is there a Youth Movement in the United States? The question cannot be answered categorically. Conferences, conventions, summer schools and camps of young people there have been, but whether these can be said to indicate a genuine stirring among the youth of the nation is open to debate. In student groups there can be found many who are considering with new interest the problems that arise out of the organization of society. But there may also be found a far larger number apparently indifferent to concerns beyond the campus. In our cities certain young people gather with enthusiasm to discuss the discovery of new roads to better living. But the huge majority do not even know that such discussion is under way, and, if apprised, would care not at all. In the sense that there is a youth movement in Germany, in Russia, in China, or in Argentina, moving the new generation in masses to the search for a better way of life, it is hardly correct to speak of an American youth movement.

Yet, acknowledging this, there are good evidences that a genuine American youth movement, if not actually under

way, may soon come to power. And there are indications that this movement, if it comes, will be in many essentials different from the movements that have arisen in other nations.

The series of conventions held in the past year and a half in which the new generation has most clearly spoken indicates the character of some of these differences. Beginning with the Indianapolis convention, passing into a new stage with that at Louisville, and now taking still another form with the convention at Ann Arbor, it is growing clear that, however varied the issues that are being discussed by these young people, they are willing to come together because of a common interest in the assertion of spiritual values. Even those who have given up the churches as a bad job, or who rather glory in an attitude of aggressive agnosticism toward the doctrinal forms of religion, seem to find themselves at home in these open discussions under avowedly religious auspices. If there is to be an American youth movement, there is at least a good chance that it will be, in its fundamentals, devoted to the reign of the spiritual in all aspects of our common life.

Against conditions in other lands, the aspects of an incipient youth movement in this country show a variety of interests. There is promise of a youth movement in education; a promise that finds expression in the growing dissatisfaction with present classroom methods, and in the birth of several student-controlled periodicals which deal vigorously with the shortcomings of the present American school system. There may soon be a youth movement seeking a new social and economic order; a promise that can be seen in the success of the liberal type of social science school, as well as in the response to education of the same sort within the labor ranks. There is little promise of a youth movement in politics. But a youth movement in religion is, as

has been said, a clear possibility. And this movement seems to have some chance to become the common adventure that binds all the others together.

Up to this time this youth movement in religion has appeared under two forms. It has been seen within the present church organization, and it has been seen without. There is every cause for gratitude and hope in the amount of religious interest that has been evinced by young people wholly outside the life of the established communions. But there is even more promise in the stirring among the young people who are still within the ranks of the churches. There has been, however, a disposition on the part of some churches to so control this new access of energy as to make sure that there will be no adventures in nonconformity. This control, exercised by well-meaning but organizationally-minded adults, has not encouraged the growth of a genuine movement of youth.

The interdenominational conference projected for the coming Christmas holidays may bring conclusive evidence as to whether or not there is or is to be in this country a youth movement with a religious basis. It may offer incentives that will stir the young people in other communions to the same eagerness that has already been discovered among young Methodists and Presbyterians. It may offer proof to many young people that the churches, in spite of outward seeming, still offer a place of service for those with burning hearts and free minds. It may—surely this is not too vaunting a hope!—place the churches in the way of attaining a new relation to and vitality in dealing with the present issues of human relationships.

Of course, this will only be possible if the "hands off" policy on the part of the older generation continues. Even too much readiness to advise may be harmful when young minds are seeking their own solutions. And any nervous-

ness lest that which is sacrosanct be not recognized leads inevitably to the sterility of such a movement. American youth may—it takes faith even to use that verb—may come to a great adventure in service within a fellowship of spiritual search. "Indianapolis, Louisville, Ann Arbor, and now this culminating gathering to be held at a place still undecided, hint that the salvation dependent on these new minds may be forthcoming. But they will not be found if the present aspirations of youth are hedged within the walls erected during the former days. Nor will they be found in numbers until it is plain that there will be a welcome extended them. So that, after all, it seems to be a choice of the churches as to whether they want a real youth movement or not.—*Christian Century*, April 30, 1925.

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